

**STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS  
CHAIRMAN  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY, AND STANDARDS  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Floor Consideration  
H.R.5450, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Act  
Wednesday September 20, 2006

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 5450, as amended by the Science Committee. H.R. 5450, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Act, is an organic act for NOAA. An organic act defines the overall mission and functions of an agency. In 1970, President Nixon established NOAA in the Department of Commerce by Executive Order. Since that time, Congress has not passed an organic act for NOAA, and today NOAA's authorities come from over three dozen issue-specific laws.

In 2004, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, a non-partisan group of the nation's leading ocean experts, recognized this lack of Congressional direction for NOAA as an impediment to the agency's vital leadership role. The Commission strongly recommended that Congress pass a NOAA organic act. We in Congress need to provide NOAA and its employees clear direction and the tools they require to perform critical missions and functions that effect the everyday lives of all Americans ---- including forecasts and storm warnings from the National Weather Service and alerts from the National Ocean Service about dangerous conditions such as toxic algal blooms.

In response to this need, I introduced the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Act. My bill gives NOAA a clear mission so it can more effectively set program goals. For example, my bill states that the mission of NOAA is to:

- (1) understand and predict changes in the Earth's oceans and atmosphere;
- (2) conserve and manage coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes ecosystems; and
- (3) educate and inform our fellow citizens about these topics.

H.R. 5450 then directs NOAA to reorganize so it can more efficiently accomplish this mission. Based on recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, my bill establishes NOAA within the Department of Commerce, and requires NOAA to restructure so it may improve the way it carries out the critical functions of operations and services, research and education, and resource management.

H.R. 5450 strengthens science at the NOAA by:

- creating a new Deputy Assistant Secretary for Science and Education;
- authorizing a Science Advisory Board;
- requiring a National Academies assessment of the agency's data and information systems; and
- directing NOAA to develop a strategic plan for its research programs.

Valuable input from my colleagues on the Science Committee further strengthened Congressional oversight provisions of H.R. 5450 and the bill now includes a provision to ensure that NOAA does not get in over its head with large programs, such as building weather satellites. This provision requires NOAA to use more streamlined and transparent cost baselines for major programs, and to notify Congress when there are significant cost increases or schedule delays in major procurement programs.

Passage of an organic act for NOAA is a top priority for both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the privately-funded Pew Ocean Commission. The Administration, States and numerous advocacy groups have also expressed support for a NOAA organic act. H.R. 5450 has wide-spread and bipartisan support. The bill incorporates ideas from a range of experts and from Members on both sides of the aisle.

Everyone recognizes this bill is not a complete organic act because it omits issues solely in the jurisdiction of the House Resources Committee and I believe we all share the goal of seeing a complete bill.

I thank all of my colleagues who contributed to this bill as well as those who continue to express support. In particular, I want to thank Mr. Udall. He was the Ranking Member of my subcommittee when we first started working on this bill. I also want to thank Mr. Wu, the current Ranking Member of my subcommittee; and Mr. Gordon, the Ranking Member of the full Committee, for their help and input throughout the process. Additionally, I thank Mr. Gilchrest, a leader on ocean issues and an original co-sponsor of this bill, for his valuable input. Finally, I would especially like to thank Chairman Boehlert, also an original co-sponsor, for his unwavering support and commitment to moving this bill through the process. Chairman Boehlert has long been a strong champion for the science and science-based decision-making envisioned in H.R. 5450 and we will greatly miss his leadership on these issues.

H.R. 5450 will make NOAA stronger and more capable of doing its job to keep us safe, understand our environment, and manage our coastal and marine resources. This bill is an important step forward for ocean issues and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues here in the House, and in the Senate, to get a final bill that is clear, well-balanced, and complete. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5450, and I reserve the balance of my time.